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I-5 Accident Takes Seven Lives - Injures 37

Seven people were killed and 37 injured last Wednesday at 3:45 p.m. in a chain reaction traffic accident which involved seven trucks and 16 cars on I-5, one mile north of the Hwy. 34 Corvallis/Lebanon interchange south of Albany.

Those killed were Loladale Pickens Mills, 75, Tigard; Travis Trujillo, 8, Altaloma, California; Louise Ann Morgan, 64, Canby and the Rodewald family, William, 36, Kathleen, 36, Dayiel, 2, and Mia, 8 months. Thirty seven people were taken to Corvallis and Albany Hospitals for injury treatment.

As the sequence of events unfolded, which led to the tragedy, it was apparent that smoke from a field fire had drifted across I-5 causing visibility to be, for a short time, totally blacked out. Cars and trucks entering the smoke had to stop. As those first vehicles stopped others began plowing into them and flames soon began to engulf many vehicles as fuel tanks ruptured.

Kevin Sterba, 22, who was driving a chip truck for D and L Spinney Co., of Portland, entered the smoke and struck something. His truck was then hit by another vehicle. As he looked across he could see people trapped in vehicles and fire was spreading rapidly. Sterba was able to get two people out before flames took over.

Witnesses said some injured were walking and crawling away from their burning vehicles, while others tried to help trapped people. Some accident victims ran back down the freeway to warn oncoming motorists, who could not see the accident.

At about 3:30 p.m. an Albany Fire Department engine crew had been dispatched to help Tangent fight a field fire on Horn Lane. Earlier Paul Stutzman, who farms south of Albany near I-5, had been authorized by DEQ to burn 82 acres of straw which was about 1/8 of a mile west of I-5. A proper 64 inch wide fire guard was plowed around the 82 acre field which was to be burned. Stutzman also had all the proper fire fighting equipment in place, including three water trucks and a sprayer.

As the controlled burn started a north east wind was blowing and no problems were observed. Possibly because of a sudden shift in wind, sparks suddenly crossed the fire break, starting the field next to I-5 ablaze. Quickly a call for help was put out. Tangent responded along with Albany.

Albany Fire Department Battalion Chief Rich LaBelle and two other fire fighters was responding to the field fire call when suddenly their dispatcher rerouted them to a multiple motor vehicle accident on I-5. As they approached about a quarter of a mile of wrecked cars, trucks and bodies could be seen.

Continued on page three

Locals Charged With Ten Counts Of Arson

Ronald Scott Amos, 18, Brownsville, and Todd Leon Fisher, 19, Brownsville, were arrested early Monday morning and each charged with ten counts of first-degree arson.

Also arrested and charged with 10 counts of second-degree arson were two 16 year old boys from Shedd who were taken to Juvenile Detention Hall in Salem.

At about 12:30 a.m. Monday, reports began to be phoned in reporting haystacks being on fire on both sides of I-5 from Halsey to Tangent. Fire fighting crews from Halsey/Shedd, Tangent, Lebanon and Brownsville responded to fires as far east as Plainview, north to McFarland Road and south to Bell Plain Drive. From 12:30 a.m. until 2 a.m. crews fought the stack fires.

People called the sheriff's office saying they had seen a large dark pickup leave an area after a stack started to burn.

At about 1:30 a.m. an Oregon State Police Officer saw a dark colored pickup on Linn West Road a mile east of 99E. A short time later Linn County deputies Pat Harmon and Chris Becze arrested all four.



Wreckers pull apart cars and trucks that crashed together when smoke from field burning blew

over I-5, five miles south of Albany last Wednesday.

Times photos by Ralph Sand



Rescue workers look for bodies in a car which was totally smashed and burned when hit by a

chip truck.

Times photos by Kurt Sand



This truck which was hauling yogurt was lucky - it only had its side torn off. It managed to stay

upright and did not burn.

Times photos by Kurt Sand

Heroes Are Created

I-5 Accident Brings Out Best In People

People do not start out to be heroes in a situation like the massive accident on I-5 five miles south of Albany last Wednesday but an inner strength enables normal people to do abnormal acts.

Paula George, 36, brought her 1979 GMC van to a successful halt in a black cloud of smoke. After her van was hit twice in the rear, George got four of her eldest children out and headed them toward a fence. Now she worked at getting her two younger children out of their car seats. Each time she reached for them another car would hit hers from the back. Finally out of desperation she grabbed the car seat that her daughter Jaclyn, 1, was in and threw it out onto the road but flames were approaching the child so George picked up the child and handed her to a man. She then went back for two year old Johnny and threw him to the same man. George then ran through flames to reach her six children and they all ran north away from the fire. A driver of an undamaged van took Paula George, David, 7, Johnny, 2, Jaclyn, 1, Paul, 10, Christopher, 9 and Samantha, 6, to Albany General Hospital where 10 year old Paul was treated for burns he received when he went back to the van to see if he could help his mother.

David, Jaclyn and Johnny also received burns. Paula has burns on both legs.

Another hero was Jimmy Phillips who had his pickup hit from behind and after getting his wife Laurie and two of their children Nick, 11, and Paula, 7, to safety went back to save others. Screams calling

for help came from a man in one vehicle which was ablaze. Phillips could not reach him.

In a second truck following them was Phillips' brother Floyd his wife Joy, their son Larry, 13, and Jimmy Phillips' daughter Tamara, 8.

Jimmy Phillips and his family were moving to Raymond, Washington from Arizona and had everything they owned in the two trucks. All was a total loss.

Joy Phillips was hospitalized with a broken pelvis and possible broken back. Nick had a cracked kneecap and Paula had a cut which may have damaged nerves and muscles.

Both families spent several days at FISH guest house until friends from Washington could come and get them.

FISH is a house operated by the First Christian Church, 432 Ferry S.W., Albany. A fund has been set up for Phillips' and donations of help may be sent there.

A truck driver, who did not want to be indentified, attended to several injured people after he got out of his truck uninjured.

Kevin Sterba, 22, a truck driver from Portland, was driving a chip truck. As he entered the dense smoke he hit something and was immediately hit. He got out of his truck and rushed to help two people from their vehicle. As he looked back his truck was totally ablaze.

Upon hearing of the wreck employees from Selmet Inc. rushed to the scene which was less than 100 yards

from their building, with water hoses and did what they could to comfort the injured before ambulances arrived.

Floyd Phillips, of Raymond, Washington, was the man who, after seeing his own family was safe, caught the two babies thrown out of a burning vehicle by Paula George, of Vancouver, Washington. Highway workers, firefighters, police, EMT personnel and many individuals were heroes beyond what they thought they could do.

Brownsville Municipal Court Report

THOMPSON, Kyler Edwin, 107 Coshaw, Brownsville Minor in possession or an alcoholic beverage by consumption - Fine: \$51.00

REYNOLDS, Molly Bee, 903 Ash Street, Brownsville, No insurance - Fine; \$57.00, Driving while operators license suspended - Fine; \$210.00

THORN, Michael Alan, 25735 Little Valley Lane, Brownsville, Exceeding Maximum speed (61-35) - Fine; \$157.00

THOMPSON, Robert E., 40105 Hwy. 228, Sweet Home, No operators license - Fine; \$67.00

Field Burning Rules

Could Change Industry

Thousands of acres of grass seed straw lay unburned while state officials meet to discuss the fate of field burning in the Willamette Valley.

All field burning has been halted following last Wednesday's traffic accident on I-5, five miles south of Albany which took seven lives. Smoke from an authorized burn, which had got out of control, drifted across I-5 causing poor visibility which led to a 23 car accident.

Gov. Neil Goldschmidt has appointed a committee to study ways to prevent such an accident again. DEQ officials, state police, Department of Agriculture and state executive branch management personnel are on the committee.

New field burning restrictions, reports say, will no doubt affect burning, especially near the freeway.

Farmers say field burning is now the only cost effective way to rid fields of straw and prepare them for next year's crop. If field burning is stopped, they say, the grass seed industry would suffer greatly. For years urban groups have been trying to stop burning because of smoke which drifts mainly over Eugene and Sweet Home.

New burning regulations will be announced this week.

Editorial/Opinion

To the Editor:

We have a bill in congress being voted on this week to pay the Japs' who were saved from possible serious harm at the beginning of WWII by placing them in a secure and safe place for the duration of the war. Anyone who was involved with security at that time or for that matter, anyone who is interested in educating themselves on the subject, there are volumes upon volumes of documentary evidence regarding the hostile environment toward the Japs and rightly so. I was in a security related occupation during and before that time. Our objective was to secure positive information as to who and how much defense information was getting to our sworn enemies, one of these same enemies who killed thousands of men in a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Our already weakened fleet created by the same groups who today would obstruct our National Defense with their seditious acts and ideals.

Anyone who was in or around shipbuilding before Pearl Harbor will back up this statement. I have literally seen hundreds of Japs' with cameras around their necks taking pictures of our defense buildup. Don't ever try to sell me this crap on the poor innocent Japs! I was there! If we are going to pay anyone for anything let's start with the Bataan Death March Survivors. I have a personal friend, a Navy Nurse (ret.) who spent the entire war in a Jap prison camp. Ask her about the humane and benevolent Japs'. I know any number of men who spent the war in Jap prison camps with not one word from their captors to their families and loved ones. Ask the international Red Cross who were not allowed to intervene. Ask the young men who (including this writer) fought the war with nothing to fight with until our defense forces were built up. Ask the men at the Canal, Midway, Attu. Men who fought their way across the Mandates island by island. Ask the people who survived the rape of China and the Mongolian Nations. Ask anyone who enjoyed the hospitality of the Japs' in regard to the Geneva Convention agreement as to the conduct and medical treatment on the battlefield. The list goes on and on.

To repeat myself in a former letter to this Editor, I personally was in a small way part of the planning of the invasion of the home island of HONSHU. I have set in planning meetings and the best estimate I have ever heard was the loss expectancy for the one island just to invade was over 500,000 men killed, not to mention the wounded and maimed. Yes, this is the same Japs' these do-gooders are wringing their hands about today. In proper perspective in Vietnam we lost in 16 years under 50,000 men (admittedly one is too many) in great part caused by these same Yo-Yo's.

Was it better to lobse all these men or bomb

Hiroshima, a major industrial center and Nagasaki (which we warned in advance both in both cases). Although we had fire bombed Tokyo and other cities to near destruction, it was not until the bomb did we get their attention. Thank God at long last we brought these barbarians to their knees. On August 6th, 1988, I hope the overage products of the sixties who held their sunrise services in the Pioneer Cemetery also said a prayer for the likes of WIMPY LAMMONS CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR WINNER (Posthumously) fighting these same Japs' aboard the USS Nevada at Pearl Harbor as well as many of my friends I left out there. In fact, I know of one or two who are buried in the Brownsville Pioneer Cemetery I am sure would agree with me.

We have the best chance for peace in fifty (50) years, Russia is pulling out of Afghanistan they have ordered Hanoi to pull in their troops, Cuba has been ordered to pull out of Angola and Namiba, South Africa is talking self government, Commies are having trouble in Central America, It looks as though Congress just might support a decent cause for a change as well as our President. There is meaning debate on arms reduction. This has all come about through a strong defense and the determination that the majority of us are not going to give up our system without a fight to a pot smoking generation who has contributed so very little.

Yes, the HIROSHIMA MEMORIAL IS VERY FITTING. It will be a long time before the Japanese or anyone else will try evil of the likes of Pearl Harbor. Thank God.

/S/Paul O. Fitzgerald
CWO-3, (Ret) U.S. Navy
Brownsville, Oregon

To the Editor:

The recent Linn County 4-H/FFA Fair reminds us of how valuable 4-H and FFA Club work is in the development of our young people. A real note of thanks to the many 4-H leaders - all volunteers - who give so freely of their time and expertise. We appreciate both the 4-H and FFA parents who recognize the importance of the club work and the development and leadership opportunities it provides.

4-H club work was one of the most important parts of my own growing up years. I am thankful for the training our four children received as a result of their 4-H and FFA activities. I would encourage all young people to get involved with either 4-H or FFA.

Congratulations to all the exhibitors and their leaders. The Fair was a job well done.

/S/Liz VanLeeuwen
State Representative
House District 37

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Send in YOUR News!

I-5 Accident

Continued from page one

"Smoke, fire and screaming people is all I could see as I got out of my truck."

LaBelle said, "It was a mess, the worst I have ever seen."

Other early witnesses compared it to scenes in Vietnam.

One truck driver said, as he entered the smoke it was gray and he slowed down but suddenly it turned black and there was no visibility.

Employees of Selmet Inc., a metals plant just east of the I-5 accident, were notified and responded with water hoses and people to help with what they could.

AA Towing of Albany was called to help remove burned vehicles. Owner Loren Wagener said it was the worst wreck he had seen in 38 years.

Wreckers began pulling apart smashed and burned vehicles and a gruesome scene unfolded as six burned bodies were removed from totally burned vehicles. Loladale Mills and Louise Ann Morgan from one and William, Kathleen, Dayiel and Mia Rodewalds from their Volkswagen van. Travis Trujillo, 8, was killed when he was thrown from the vehicle he was riding in and struck by another.

As those first at the accident assessed needs fire engines and ambulances from Albany, Lebanon and Corvallis were called along with off duty fire fighters and medics from Albany. Fire Department stand-by

crews from Halsey and Tangent were also alerted.

When first reports reached Albany General Hospital of such a horrendous accident scene, staff members thought it was maybe an emergency drill but soon their worst fears were recognized when they realized this was the real thing.

Professional and un-professional people began to respond as injured and needy people were taken care of. Thirty people were treated at Albany General Hospital by on-duty and off-duty personnel who responded to an emergency call. According to reports the hospital's emergency plan worked as it should. Nine people were taken to Good Samaritan Hospital in Corvallis.

All deaths and most serious injuries were to people traveling north. Southbound traffic was held up for a short time with a minor accident and resumed about 5:30 p.m.

Northbound traffic was diverted at the Hwy. 34 interchange to Albany up 99E and over to Seven Mile Lane then north. I-5 northbound did not open until about midnight Wednesday after all the debris was cleared away.



Intense heat literally welded this truck and car together in the I-5 crash last Wednesday that

took seven lives and left dozens injured.

Times photos by Ralph Sand



The driver of this truck was lucky. His cab flipped forward upon impact, but did not catch

on fire. Spilled fuel caused fire to spread rapidly among wrecked vehicles.



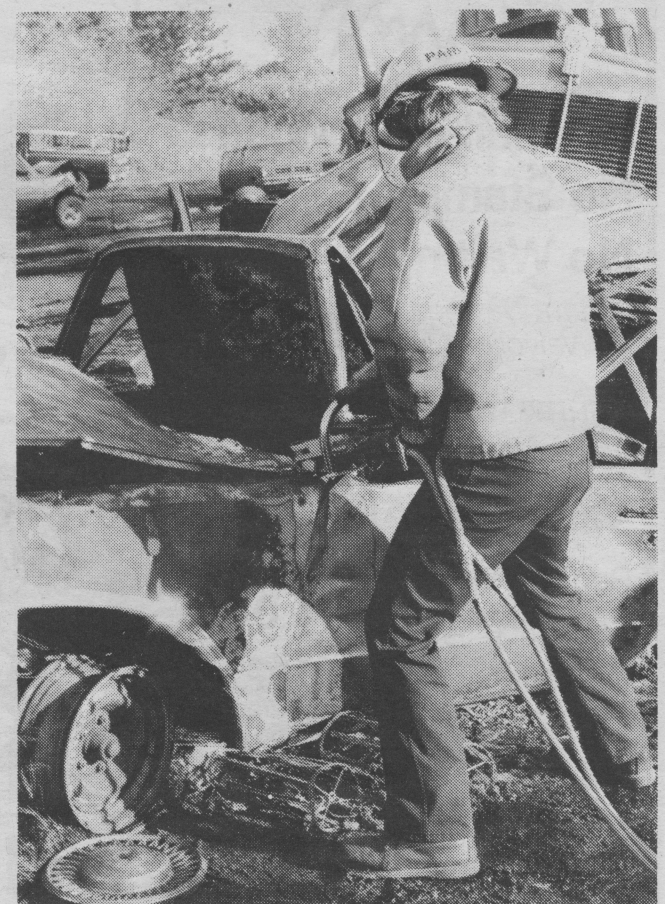
Several Oregon State Troopers at the I-5 accident scene said this was the worst wreck they had ever seen.

Times photo by Kurt Sand



Compact cars that were involved in the accident were scattered around like toys. This car was totally burned.

Times photos by Ralph Sand



Jaws of Life, a device used to cut metal, was used by rescue workers to gain entrance to burned cars.

Times photo by Kurt Sand